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ABSTRACT

A job seeker who has been asked to come in for an interview is generally one of many applicants with equally acceptable credentials. Students' chances of getting a job can be enhanced by carefully studying job interview techniques. A productive approach to this study, which can be integrated into a variety of business courses, consists of three essential parts: pre-interview preparation, the interview, and the follow-up after the interview. Pre-interview preparation consists of a survey of possible places of employment, securing information on the selected company, and creating a resume for the specific position. Dressing appropriately and arriving early for the interview also make a favorable impression. There are two kinds of interviews: observation, during which the job seeker is permitted to speak freely while being observed; and the stress interview, during which the interviewer asks a minimum of questions and then may stare at the job seeker, causing him or her to respond nervously. The job seeker can ask a variety of questions, during any uncomfortable pauses in the interview, for example, questions regarding chances for advancement and the impact of the job on the overall functioning of the company. Following the interview, the candidate should write a brief letter to the interviewer, or telephone the interviewer, to thank him or her for the time spent. Appropriate writing assignments or interview role playing can be incorporated into the classroom to teach these techniques. (An interview checklist is included.) (HTH)

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INTERVIEWING: AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE JOB SEARCH PROCESS

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Job seekers who have been asked to come in for an interview are generally one of many applicants with credentials which are equally as acceptable. If the University has prepared the student with skills and knowledge necessary to perform the job well then the question arises: What can an applicant do to distinguish himself from others who are just as well trained? Since the interview is the last in a series of elimination procedures in the job search, the applicant must find some way to communicate that he or she is the best person for the job.

Student's chances of getting a job can be enhanced by carefully studying job interview techniques. The steps suggested here may be incorporated into a variety of business courses in which job getting techniques are taught. Courses such as business communication, business internship, and cooperative education courses are especially suitable. A productive approach to a study of interview techniques consists of three essential parts: the pre-interview preparation, the interview, and the follow-up after the interview.

PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION

The quality of the interview will be directly affected by the amount of pre-interview preparation that has gone on. The demeanor of the person being interviewed and knowledge of the company where employment is being sought will come to the forefront in an interview situation.

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Interviewers are often impressed by applicants who appear confident. Characteristics such as self respect, maturity, openness, friendliness, and preciseness attribute to the confidence level of the applicant. Confidence in turn is affected positively or negatively by the amount of research activity that has gone into preparing for the interview.

Research the company

The job search should begin with a survey of places of possible employment. Using real companies which are places of possible employment will make the interview process relevant and meaningful. A study of the want ads, telephone directories, business-oriented newspapers, and trade journals may turn up valuable sources. This search introduces students to the range of employment opportunities and the various job categories that are available in the field they are studying. When researching a firm, applicants should secure information about the company such as what the company makes, sells, or the type of services provided. This will provide a foundation for asking and answering questions intelligently, and it helps the prospect to see where his job fits in the total framework of the company. Once a company has been selected, a thorough study of the annual reports, the history, and manuals will give the student a point of departure in explaining what he or she can do for the company.

With the broad background of knowledge supplied by the company manuals and other publications, the applicant is ready to prepare an application letter for a specific job within a particular company. In this instance, a resume geared to a job category that is already available will be more forceful than a general resume. On the resume, the career goal should be stated in such a way that it addresses a career than can be built around actual opportunities existing within the target company.

Dress by the book

If the applicant is asked to come in for an interview he or she must recognize that possibly many others who have equal or better qualifications will be interviewed for the same position. This second step in the job-seeking process will be the first time that appearance will count. This face to face meeting will provide the opportunity for selling the person as a total package: background, education, personality, and appearance. Since the other factors have been introduced through the correspondence, the focus turns to appearance and presentation. Therefore, it is best to dress by the book when preparing for an interview.

Molloy (1978) has impressed many people with his survey of employers which outlined the type of appearance they wanted their workers to have. Basically, for men and for women, the suggested appearance was the conservative one. Soft colors such as grays and blues are considered more appropriate than reds or oranges. Closed-toe shoes were preferred, and a minimum of jewelry was recommended. A bad first impression is a very difficult thing to overcome, consequently, it is wise to give special care to presenting an efficient-looking appearance.[1]

Cleanliness, neatness, and a friendly attitude convey a sense of cooperativeness and pleasantness. A sloppy appearance presents the employer with a first impression of carelessness and irresponsibility. Employers expect their workers to be mature and self sufficient. They expect these qualities to be mirrored through the appearance and deportment of their employees.

Of course, if an emergency has occurred and the attire is not appropriate, then a polite apology and an excuse accompanied by an explanation of the situation should suffice.

Arrive early

Often the interviewee will be asked to wait on the day of the interview. This is the time to keep good composure and to use the time constructively to prepare for the interview. The preparation should include a mental rehearsal of the expected questions or a perusal through the company literature. The letter of application and the resume should be reviewed so that qualifying attributes of the applicant are easy to recall. The applicant should also read the company literature while waiting. This is a good idea for two reasons: (1) It gives the impression of an interested, enthusiastic person who would enjoy working for the company; and (2) such reading will help the interviewee be informed and lively in the interview.

Waiting room behavior includes being courteous to the company employees who may be working there. Interviewees should remember to be friendly and respectful and to be aware that company employees may be asked for an opinion of the prospect.

THE INTERVIEW

Many applicants fail to get that important job because they do poorly during the interview. Much success depends on personal characteristics. Voice, manner, attitude, appearance, interest, and intelligence are all very important. If the preliminary preparation has been thorough, the interviewee will have reason to feel confident. A look at some types of interviews and some things to do during the interview may help the candidate know what to expect and how to prepare for it.

Types of interviews

The job seeker should be aware of two different types of interviews: obervation and stress.

Observation. In the first type, some interviewers will allow the prospect to talk and they will hardly speak at all. If the preparation has been thorough, this will present an opportunity for a display of knowledge about the company. It will also offer the chance to bring to notice the interviewee's special qualifications for the target job and ideas about how the job may be performed. If the job seeker is allowed to talk freely, he or she should insert information which was mentioned in the letter of application. This is information which has been carefully considered, and repeating it lessens the chance that an awkward or taboo subject will get into the conversation.

Stress. The second type of interview is the stress interview and this is the most difficult, but it is also very infrequent. The interviewer may ask a minimum of questions and simply stare at you and let you talk. Many applicants panic at this point and start babbling incessantly and eventually say too much and, therefore, eliminate themselves from consideration. The best way to counteract this is to answer such questions to the fullest and then pause. If there is no response, then this is the time to ask the employer some questions that have been prepared in advance (Nienkamp, 1981).[2]

If there is an uncomfortable pause during the interview, here are some questions to ask:

- What will my responsibilities be on this job?
- What are my chances for advancement?
- What do you look for in an employee?
- Who will be my superior?
- What impact does this job have on the overall functions of the company?

What is done here, therefore, is to throw the ball back to the interviewer and to take pressure off the interviewee. (An interview checklist which outlines some things to do before, during, and after the interview is attached.)

During the interview

Interview success depends largely upon the demonstration of appropriate behavior. Greet the interviewer by giving your name distinctly, then listen carefully for the interviewer's name so that you can use it during the interview. Interviewers, like other people, want to have their names pronounced correctly. Remain standing until you are invited to be seated. When seated, sit erect facing the interviewer (Peterson, 1983).[3]

Allow the interviewer to take the initiative in leading the questioning, but you may offer your resume. Be alert and responsive. Relate your qualifications and experiences to the job you are seeking. If you have never been employed, explain how your volunteer, extracurricular, or part-time work has prepared you for the job. Emphasize your strong points by showing concern for what you can do. Stress that you are interested in being a conscientious and productive worker. Employers want to know what you can do for them. They will want to know about you personally and about your interests as well.

Have a pen handy. Students should be ready, both physically and mentally, for the interview anytime they go to pick up an application form. Some companies may interview applicants as soon as they complete the application form. Because of this, the serious job seeker should carry a resume along whenever going to the target company. Using the resume as a guide, they will have the information needed to complete the application form accurately and completely. This "prepared" look will make the student appear to be more serious and well-organized.

The candidate will be more at ease if he or she remembers that this is an opportunity to evaluate the company as well as for the company to make an evaluation. The prospective employee will need to perform as well as possible,

but to be aware that this is not the end of the world and that there are other companies where his or her services may be used.

It is understandable that an individual would be worried or nervous about an important interview, but there are some things that will help lighten the burden.

- o Practice with real people. Study possible interview questions and practice answering them by reciting answers to your friends. Your next door neighbor, your relatives, and your teachers may make sympathetic listeners. This is the best form of practice because it provides for immediate feedback which is likely to be more honest and less risky than waiting for a potential employer to evaluate your answers.

- o Tape record your presentation. Record practice interviewer questions and practice interviewee answers for playback and analysis. Listen to see if all words are clearly pronounced. Are all thoughts expressed in complete sentences? Was the interviewer's name mentioned? Recording gives an excellent way to practice when you are alone because it allows you to play back the tape at anytime that is convenient.

These are two easy ways to gain practice in saying the things which need to be said in an interview. By practicing with people who will listen with empathy or by recording the answers on tapes when no one is available, you have started yourself on the road to successful interviews. Examples of some likely questions and some plausible answers follow:

Question	Suggested Answer
Why do you want to leave your present job?	"I want to leave because I want an opportunity to take on greater responsibility. I feel that I have reached a plateau in my present position and that I must leave in order to advance." Never give negatives about a former employer as a reason for wanting to leave.
Why do you want to work for this company?	"I have researched your company and I believe that the prospects for using my talents and educational background are good here. I am confident that I can handle the job of _____." Apply for a specific position and list reasons why you are capable of doing the job well.

Some subjects such as religion, politics, and race should not be discussed during the job interview. Any irrelevant information should be omitted. After the job seeker has prepared well, rehearsed the essential information from the resume, practiced answering interview questions, and built up a knowledge of the company, he or she will have much information on which to draw without resorting to irrelevant topics.

End of the interview

The interviewer will give the signal that the interview is at a close. This is done by various cues such as standing, offering a handshake, or making a job offer. If you receive a job offer and you are not sure you want to accept it, you should ask for a few days to think. If salary has not been mentioned during the interview then this is the time to ask about it. Emphasis should be placed on the job rather than on the salary. Wait for an offer before talking about salary otherwise steer clear of this topic. It is wise to be prepared to make a decision on the spot if necessary.

If you are interested in the position, be sure that you say so because other applicants will probably be interviewed for the same position before a decision is made. If this is the case, you will be contacted at a later date. Thank the interviewer at the close with a positive and pleasant expression. Be sure to indicate again that you are interested in the position and that you are looking forward to hearing from the interviewer soon.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Several things should be done if the candidate is still interested in working with the company after the initial interview with the employer. Contact the employer right after the interview. Write a brief letter to the interviewer

or telephone to say that you appreciate the time spent with you and that you are still interested in the position. Add that you can be of service and will work hard if choosen for the position. This tactic may not be the deciding factor, but it may tip the scales in your favor if the odds are even.

If you do not receive a reply to either your phone call or letter, then consider the whole process a learning episode. If you are turned down, try to find out why so that you can address that problem before applying elsewhere. Study these deficiencies and try to develop procedures to counter them before going to your next interview.

If you have moved or if you have received an award or increased your employability status in some way, then update your resume to include your new achievements and make preparations to try with another company. If you receive a better offer, be sure to accept it or reject it as soon as possible. You may want to think it over for a few days if you are being considered for another position, but you should let the employer know that you will need some time. In any case evaluate the entire process carefully so that your next attempt will be more polished.

INCORPORATING THE INTERVIEW EXERCISE

When it has been determined which course the job interview exercise will be placed, the teacher will need to decide where such a section will "fit" and the content of the course. If resume writing or letter of application is part of the content, the job interview is easily placed as a culminating activity. The written assignments should include statements which "sell" the candidate in much the same way as the interview. If writing is not a part of the course, as in a speech course, role playing is a good way of incorporating interview practice. Students may interview personnel directors in order to develop a

list of interview questions to use in the role playing. Members of the class could serve as jurors to decide whether or not a prospect should be hired.

The decision also must be made as to just how long or how encompassing a section on job interview should be. It may be a brief portion of instruction that identifies specific material. The use of assignments on letters of application, resumes, and job search techniques may lead up to a dramatic presentation of interviews. In this case one or two class periods of interview practice may be needed. Guest speakers from business such as a personnel officer and/or the college placement officer can provide enriching experiences and add to the body of knowledge about interview competencies.

As a part of oral communication training, mock interviews are especially effective if a recruiter will participate. These interviews can be videotaped and played back for analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the participants. Of course, the evaluators will have to be careful in criticizing these participants so that their delicate sensibilities and egos will not suffer. After all, these are personal evaluations. The interview can be tape recorded, critiqued, improved, and played back with participation from the students. This will impress upon students the need for repeated practice and feedback before improvement can take place. Then too, it may lead creative students and teachers to develop new ways of practice and improvement which can be shared with fellow candidates for employment.

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THE 6-6-6 INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. Study the company background.
2. Arrive a few minutes before the interview time.
3. Know exactly where the interview will take place.
4. Arrive neat and clean and dressed appropriately.
5. Bring your personal data sheet and a copy of your letter of application.
6. Bring a list of questions you are going to ask the interviewer.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. Emphasize what you can do.
2. Take a pen or pencil, but don't take notes during the interview.
3. Watch your grammar.
4. Be sure you understand the questions.
5. Expect to spend some time developing rapport.
6. Wait for an offer to talk about salary.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. List points that seemed to impress the interviewer.
2. List negative factors that might influence the interviewer.
3. Review the qualifications that you discussed.
4. Study the questions the interviewer asked you.
5. Write a follow-up letter thanking for the interview.
6. Prepare for the next interview.

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FOOTNOTES

1. John T. Molloy, Dress for Success (New York: Warner Books, 1978).

2. Roger L. Neinkamp, Preparing for a Successful Job Interview (Forest Park, Mo.: Saint Louis Community College, 1981), p. 8.

3. Elwood Peterson, Getting and Keeping a Job: A Practical Guide for Students (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah State Office of Education, 1983), p. 39.